

# Driving Decision:

## Seniors on the Road

Just what does driving represent to us as a society? Research abounds about Americans and their cars. In broad strokes, we don't like carpooling. We don't like mass transit. We're attached to our cars. Is it about independence? Being able to take care of ourselves and zip from point A to point B in a breeze? Probably these and other things. And, as we "get up there" in years, the prospect of at some point not driving can often add insult to the many injuries of getting old.

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For families with aging parents, it's a tricky issue, and a deeply emotional one, too. No one wants to hurt mom's or dad's feelings, or risk a family disagreement over it.

But truth is, older drivers account for a higher rate of accidents and fatalities per mile, second only to the youngest drivers (16-24). So says the AARP (American Association of Retired Persons). Worsening vision can play a big role.

So, what to do? Here's a hit list of must-dos for seniors:

1. You need a complete eye exam each and every year. Key tests include visual sharpness, peripheral vision, contrast sensitivity, cataracts, glaucoma and retinal health.
2. Make sure your eye doctor knows about all the medications you're taking, even vitamins and over-the-counter items. You might be surprised, but a lot of drugs can impact vision.
3. Keep windshields, mirrors and headlights clean.
4. Always keep headlights on in rain and snow, even during the day.
5. Check the aim of your headlights every six months.
6. Don't depend just on mirrors – when backing up, turn your head and check out the back window too.
7. Go back to school – the AARP 55 Alive classroom driver improvement course, to be exact. It was developed just for drivers 50 and older, and gives tips to help you improve driving performance as you age.
8. Vision isn't to blame for all driving errors, so get a physical every year, too, including a hearing check.

### What to look for?

Check out these signs that could mean you or your aging loved one might pose a risk on the road because of vision problems.

- Slow reaction time to road signs and crossing pedestrians.
- Thinking eyewear is to blame for roadway miscues.
- Tilting the head up and down to see which bifocal lens works best.
- Drifting in and out of lanes.
- Braking too soon or too late.
- Complaints about glare or reflections.
- Squinting, especially in low light or bad weather.
- Dents and dings from parking problems.
- Near misses or accidents.